

Testimony of Robyn Trowbridge, Meriden, Connecticut

Monday March 16, 2009

Government Administration and Elections Committee

Commenting on:

**H. B. No. 6375 AN ACT CONCERNING REVIEW AND TERMINATION OF CERTAIN
BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS.**

**S. B. No. 839 AN ACT CONCERNING MERGERS AND CONSOLIDATIONS OF VARIOUS
STATE AGENCIES.**

**S. B. No. 840 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ELIMINATION OF THE OFFICE OF
CONSUMER**

**COUNSEL, THE OFFICE OF THE HEALTHCARE ADVOCATE, THE OFFICE OF
OMBUDSMAN FOR PROPERTY RIGHTS AND CERTAIN LEGISLATIVE
COMMISSIONS**

Dear Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and members of the Government
Administration and Elections Committee,

I am addressing you at this time with regard to House bill numbers 840, 839 and 6375.
As an appointed parent member of the family support council I find myself gravely
concerned over the current recommendation to eliminate the Family Support Council,
the Office of the Child Advocate, Office of the Healthcare Advocate and the Commission
on Children.

I have had the profound professional privilege of serving on the Family Support Council
for many years; and within that capacity, as a partner with representatives from the
Office of the Child Advocate and the Commission on Children. We are proud of the
unified efforts of this collaborative and find it impossible to imagine that families of
children with disabilities and special healthcare needs can be even marginally
safeguarded without the continued advocacy of these working bodies.

Clearly, over the course of Connecticut's history, such entities have been created as a
result of significant unmet need and devastating outcomes experienced by our families
and most vulnerable citizens. And while the current fiscal challenges require us to make
difficult decisions, it is now more critical then ever that the State preserves and
protects the basic interests of our kids. In current time, and for the foreseeable future,
families are facing a depth of crisis that has not been seen in decades and our children
need us to stand strong with and for them as they cannot, by the sheer nature of who
they are, do it on their own.

The Family Support Council, working in large part as a coordinating body toward
creating and sustaining partnerships across State agencies, has assisted in advocating
for vital legislation on behalf of families in need, served to establish a meaningful and
operational service network that supports hundreds of families annually through direct
support efforts and works to forward the significant efforts of numerous State agency
partners. These achievements persist despite the Family Support Council having no
funding. These efforts must continue for Connecticut's families' needs to be met.

With regard to the continued existence of the Office of the Child Advocate, Office of the Healthcare Advocate, and the Commission on Children, I cannot underscore enough the impact that these entities have on families each and everyday. We know that many Connecticut families are struggling and that unfortunately is likely to continue. However, every family reached by these offices, hundreds of them, are living in what all of us would agree are the most desperate of circumstances. Gravely ill children, many with profound lifelong disabilities, often without economic advantages or an independent ability to meaningfully and effectively navigate a far too complex system that promises in the most fundamental of ways to assist in accessing what is so basic to us all. Eliminating these agencies, which not only promise possibility but deliver true outcome is both tragic and unacceptable.

The accomplishments and contributions of these Commissions are well documented and highly measurable. The costs attached to such far reaching positive impact for the most vulnerable among us is so minimal and we know that the qualitative consequence will be devastating if we try to convince ourselves that services such as these can be adequately provided by large existing state agencies. We know this will be inadequate, ineffective, and ultimately will devastate families. We already see countless negative outcomes for families from an overburdened system that simply can't respond. We cannot move in a direction as a State where we dismantle supports for families. We must continue to put the needs of families and kids before all else as this is our future.

Robyn Trowbridge
Meriden